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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the history and relationship of school counselors and school social workers in Wyoming. The establishment of the guidance department at the University of Wyoming and Wyoming's original certification standards for counselors are detailed. The impetus for employing school social workers in Wyoming schools is discussed. The conflict between the two disciplines, arising out of state funding regulations which affected school district hiring practices, is described. The efforts to resolve the dispute of a state task force made up of representatives from both disciplines are described. The recommendations of the task force outlining school counselor and school social worker responsibilities are given. (MCF)

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS: WORKING TOGETHER OR PULLING APART

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SCHOOL COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS: WORKING TOGETHER OR PULLING APART

A LOOK AT THE PAST

In order to understand the feelings between counselors and social workers, it is important to know how both professions became a part of the educational system. What happened in Wyoming certainly had its unique aspects, however, there are certain similarities with what was happening in other states because of the federal legislation that played a major role in providing some of the initial funding for both training and salaries.

A LONG TRADITION

Counselors have by far the most senority in the educational system. In fact as you will see in the following history, the profession seemed to be born out of educators acknowledgment that students not only need to learn, they also need to be guided into successful use of that knowledge in their adult life. Educators were particularly concerned about students going on to acquire successful employment.

Although the Guidance Movement had its beginnings shortly after the turn of the century, the earliest recorded manifestations of that movement in the educational systems of Wyoming seemed to be the institution of a summer school course in vocational guidance in 1932. That course was so popular that it continued every summer until the Department of guidance and counseling was created in 1946. During the early forties there were several Guidance Conferences held on the Campus of the University of Wyoming which were well attended by public school personnel. These conferences were the impetus for the College of education setting up a guidance major at undergraduate and graduate levels. (Miller, 1981. p.15)

Noone remembers when the first counselor appeared on the scene in Wyoming. However, it is believed that the predecessors of the counseling profession were teachers who were given limited release time to teach "occupations" classes The first person to be employed with an official title was N.S. Stout who was called "Guidance Director of the Junior High School" in Cheyenne. This happened in the year 1942. (p.96)

However, it was not until 1946 that there was a Department of Guidance and Special Education established (p.18) and 1949 that the original certification standards for counselors were created in Wyoming. Those first standards provided for three levels of certification: 1. "Provisional" - requiring a teaching degree plus 12 hours of guidance and counseling 2. "Standard" - requiring the degree plus 20 hours 3. "Professional" - requiring a Masters degree with 30 hours in guidance. (p.62) Those standards went through several revisions before arriving at the current requirements. The funding for training in this area came first through the George-Barden or "Vocational Education" act of 1946 and later through the National Defense Education Act of 1958.

In those early years, the U.S. Office of Education made the first attempt at role clarification by adopting the following definition of guidance.

> "Guidance is the process of acquainting the individual with various ways in which he may discover and use his natural endowment, in addition to special training available from any source so that he may live and make a living to the best advantage of himself." (p.93)

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NEWCOMERS ON THE SCENE

In contrast, school social workers are relatively new to the educational scene. However, according to Tom Morris, Assistant Superintendent of Public Information at the Wyoming Department of Education, their predecessors were also an outgrowth of the teaching profession in the form of the "visiting teacher" who visited homes of students to work out truancy problems.

According to Liz Musket, Department of certification in Wyoming, the first person to be certified as a school social worker was Gloria Werner in October of 1966. Her position was funded through Title 3 legislation. Her duties included doing social histories for a newly established diagnostic center in Cheyenne. Since then the major impetus for social workers in the schools of Wyoming was the implementation of Federal Law 94-142. However, some social workers have also been funded by Title I funds serving the economically disadvantaged child.

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THE CONFLICT

The two disciplines seem to co-exist fairly well in larger districts especially at the secondary level where guidance counselors have more than enough to do with scheduling activities, arranging for scholarships, and administering tests. In these situations, they are very willing to refer students with more personal types of counseling needs to school social workers. There also is not a problem at elementary levels in districts where they hired either counselors or social workers exclusively.

Those hiring elementary counselors were usually the districts where there was an ample supply of local funding available due to high mineral tax and property tax income with a lower student population. For this reason they did not qualify for state and Federal funding. The districts hiring social workers were mostly those who had lower incomes and high student population and therefore qualified for state and federal funds available through Federal law 94-142 which insures education and related services to the handicapped child. In the Federal guidelines, one of these related services was social work. For this reason, these social workers were bound by the guidelines as to what their responsibilities could include. They were supposedly limited to doing social assessments as a part of the identification process, serving as a liason with community services to the handicapped child, and counseling with these children. In some districts, this was expanded to counseling the regular student and very readily step over into the role of counselor.

However a significant change in climate came with a court ordered equalization of funding in the state. The Wyoming Supreme

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Court had ruled that our state system was unconstitutional and discriminated against children in poorer districts. Therefore a new system was mandated by the courts and eventually passed by the legislature that forced the more wealthy districts to share some of their wealth with those not so wealthy. At that time, many of the districts were faced with an economic crunch as the energy industry went into a recession.

The wealthy districts who had hired elementary counselors were now facing funding cutbacks and looking at other funding sources for what they considered the same type of services. Some districts were now eligible for the state funding and began seeing social workers as a possible replacement for their counselors, especially ath the elementary level. Another reason that this was so economically feasible was the fact that social workers could be certified with a bachelor's degree of social work and 12 hours of education whereas counselors could only be certified with a Master's degree in guidance and counseling and two years of teaching experience. In many if not all districts, this would mean that the beginning counselor would have to be paid much more than the beginning school social worker.

To complicate matters, the state requires that some kind of counseling program be available to all children in a district in order to be accredited. There were some districts that were trying to hire social workers instead of counselors to fulfill this requirement.

As a result of all this, counselors became very threatened and with good reason because in some cases their employment was at stake. As a countermeasure, there were some counselors that were

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seeking to expand the state funding to include counselors. There were even rumors of just doing away with social workers and having counselors take their place in the special education process.

Needless to say, this is when social workers all over the state began to feel threatened also. The idea that the two disciplines complimented each other and could easily co-exist seemed very remote.

It was at this time that counselors and social workers both began to contact their own professional organizations to intervene for them in this conflict. As a result, representatives of these organizations, American personnel and guidance Association and the National Association of Social workers, contacted Audrey Cotherman the Deputy Superintendent of education in Wyoming. She in turn called for a summit meeting of the presidents of these two organizations as well as other interested parties such as heads of the departments at the University of Wyoming involved in the training of these two professions.

THE BEGINNING OF SOLUTIONS

During this meeting, one of the major questions brought up was whether or not social workers were as well trained to do counseling as counselors. A comparison of the two University programs did reveal that even at the Bachelor's level, social workers did receive training in skills very similar to those learned by counselors. Certainly, there were areas where counselors had expertise and social workers did not. On the other hand, there were areas where social workers had expertise that was lacking in counselors.

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It was evident that there is an overlapping of skills making clear role definitions extremely difficult. This was further complicated by the fact that state certification standards do not identify what either a social worker or counselor is certified to do in the schools.

Both sides of the controversy did agree that there was a need for a mutually accepted role clarification of both disciplines so that they could exist side by side within a district. Everyone also agreed, that it would not be profitable for either side to seek the elimination of the other. It was far more advantageous for us to work together and show the school systems that eventhough we are similar, we are not the same and the children of Wyoming have need for both types of services.

At this time, Audry Cotherman saw the need for further work in this area and established a State Task Force made up of representatives from both disciplines. She also assured us that funding from the state would be made available for this purpose.

SURVEY

To prepare for the Task Force, a survey was sent out to all counselors and social workers to get their input as to what their role is in the schools. The response from the survey was encouraging and signified that social workers and counselors out in the field were anxious to have some clarification of their roles. According to a summary of the survey results by the State Department's Richard Granum, 68% of social workers and 54% of the counselors responded to the survey.

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The first question asked both counselors and social workers if their district did employ both professions. A little over half the counselors said that they were working in a district where social workers were also employed. All social workers responding to the survey stated that counselors were also employed in their district. However, it should be noted that many times social workers may have counselors in the district but not at the same level.

Another question was designed to assess the work load of the two professions in comparison with each other. The two criteria considered were the number of schools served and the number of students served. In most cases social workers served more schools and yet were believed to serve less students because they were supposedly limited to those students in special education.

The survey also asked both professions to describe their role in the schools. For counselors in schools where there were no social workers, their roles included the following:

career, college, and academic counseling
Group, individual, and family counseling
classroom guidance activities
drug abuse, crisis
consultation with administrators, teachers and parents
scheduling, new student orientation
Participating in the Special Education process

When counselors did have social workers they did not seem to be as active in special education for the handicapped child, drug abuse or other more personal types of counseling.

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Social workers included in their roles the following types of activities:

Individual, group and crisis counseling with handicapped students
Liason work with school, parents and community agencies, crisis intervention
working with abuse and neglect
Teen pregnancy, substance abuse
Social, behavioral assessments, identification of handicapped or disadvantaged students
Consultation with staff, self concept development, peer relations, affective education.

Out of all this, it seemed that one of the major differences between the two professions was not what they did but the populations that they served. The two activities that seemed mutually assigned to the realm of social work were liason activities with the community and doing the social and behavioral assessments for identification of the handicapped student. Both groups were certainly involved in counseling. However, in some cases social workers were told not to call what they did counseling.

This also came through when each group was asked to describe what they thought the other should be doing. Counselors could see social workers as being liasons with the community and judicial system, working with the handicapped and otherwise disadvantaged student, abuse and neglect victims as well as other high risk special populations.

Social workers could see counselors involved in activities serving all students such as scheduling, testing, career planning, peer relations, classroom guidance, affective education, in general counseling with the regular student dealing with normal developmental problems.

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As to satisfaction with the relationship between the two professions, the comments ranged all the way from very positive "working together serving different populations, communicating well and not overlapping" to "no communication at all".

Overall both professions acknowledged that schools did have need of both types of services and neither side voiced their wish to eliminate the other from the schools. Their only desire was to have a clearer definition of how the two roles could compliment the other.

THE TASK FORCE IN ACTION

In April of 1983, the task force met in Cheyenne to look at ways to to clarify roles and bring an end to the conflict. Included on the Task Force were two social workers, one elementary and one secondary, two guidance counselors, one elementary and one secondary, as well as one school psychologist and a representative from the State Department.

One of the major barriers to begin with was the counselors feeling that social workers should be required to have a Master's degree in Social Work and possibly even the two years of teaching experience. This would put the two professions on an equal level as far as beginning salary schedules and would not make it advantagious economically for schools to hire social workers to replace counselors. However, the State Department did not foresee this change in certification coming in the near future.

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A compromise was needed and the TAsk Force decided to recommend that if school districts did hire a Bachelor's level social worker they should have to provide for some type of Master's of Social Work supervision. This could be done within the district or from without on a consultant type basis. According to the social workers represented this was in accordance with their National Association's standards that state a Bachelor's level social worker should be in a supervised position. With this barrier out of the way, the Task Force went on to create the following document outlining their recommendations.

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The Task Force members met April 19, 1984 and agreed on the need for both school social workers and school counselors to be present and appropriately utilized as part of a comprehensive school counseling program. The Task Force also acknowledges that cooperation between disciplines is essential to meeting the needs of all children within the school setting.

The Task Force recommends the following as responsibilities of school counselors and school social workers.

School Counselor Primary Responsibilities

1. To coordinate and conduct effective, educational activities designed to meet age-appropriate developmental goals.

2. To gather, evaluate, interpret and disseminate information to meet student, parent, school, and community needs including individual group assessments when appropriate.

3. To work with students and their parents to help them develop socially, emotionally, and educationally to their fullest potential.

4. To assist school personnel and parents in developing and maintaining optimal school experiences for all students.

School Social Worker Responsibilities

1. To serve as a liaison for school personnel, parent, and community agencies concerning student needs.

2. To provide information and complete socio-behavioral assessment for team evaluation that will assist in student identification and programming.

3. To help students and their families cope with exceptional situations such as handicapping conditions, abuse, neglect, and dysfunctional families.

General Recommendations

1. The Task Force recognizes the need for a systematic approach to program supervision and evaluation. This includes the supervision of personnel and their specific functions. The Task Force recommends that bachelor's degree level social workers be supervised by a master's degree level social worker.

2. Counseling services should be provided according to funding regulations.

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REFERENCES

Granum, Richard (1984). Summary of Survey of Role Perceptions Among Counselors and Social Workers . Wyoming Department of Education, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

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* Some of the information in this paper was gathered by the Author's personal participation in the preliminary meeting and the Task Force on this subject. Also, she was at the time, the President of the Wyoming Chapter of NASW and practicing in the Wyoming schools as a school social worker. Because of this she was involved in the initial contact with the State Department that lead to subsequent action on this issue.